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ABSTRACT

The process of "webbing" is described as a valuable technique for organizing teaching activities around a theme. Two examples are illustrated using the broad topics of "change" and "fall." Suggestions are made for carrying out the fall theme by taking children on outdoor walks for the purpose of observing, examining, and collecting materials from nature. Activities involving the study of leaves, trees, seeds, and grasses are described. Instructions are provided for 12 follow-up art activities which use the natural materials collected on the walks. (JW)

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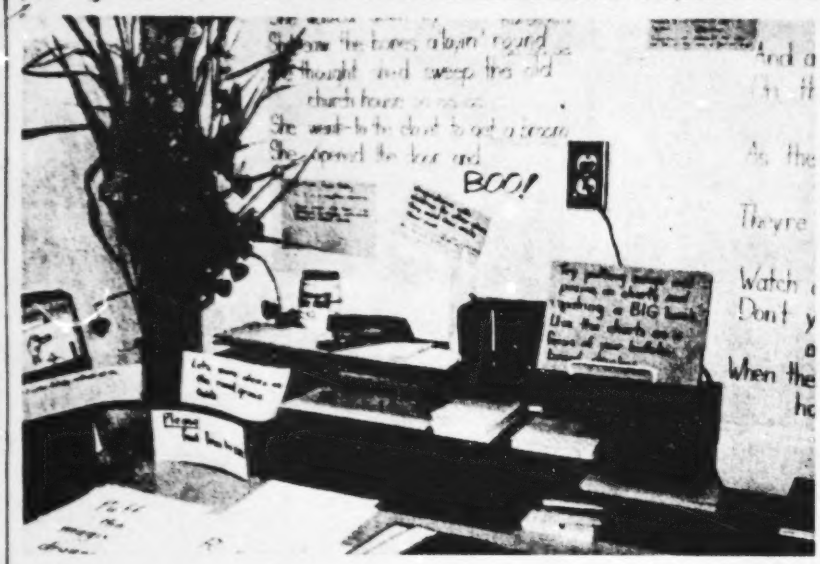

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Themes

by Rosanne Kessens

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Themes

By Rosanne Kessens

"I found that organizing curriculum around a theme resulted in better use of time and materials and increased my ability to incorporate isolated subject areas of the curriculum into learning experiences for children."

Themes

Not enough time in the day for art, music, science, social studies, etc.? Do you want the children to have more language experiences?

The use of themes will often help a teacher in planning the curriculum which will be most beneficial to the students.

THEMES - help to integrate the curriculum areas

- stimulate various ways of investigating a subject
- allow for individual interests
- lead to knowledge about subjects which normally are not part of the curriculum
- social studies, science, spelling, art and music lend themselves to teaching through themes

Some teachers have found the process of WEBBING a valuable help in planning themes. Here are two examples of webbing which you might find helpful in your own planning.

Change

Changes occur everywhere and at all times. Change affects us and our environment. We can affect some changes; some changes are natural and beyond our control. By studying data, children may discover patterns that can make future change predictable.

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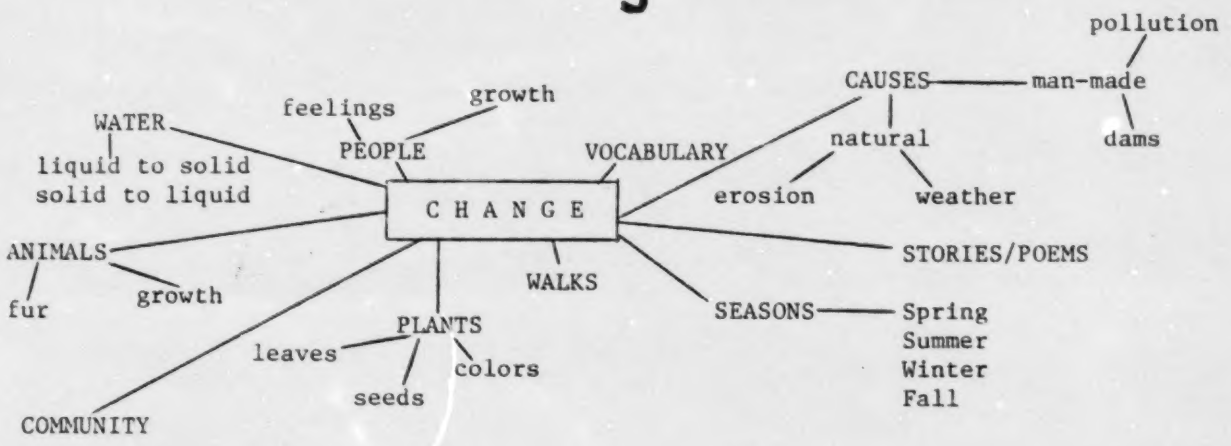
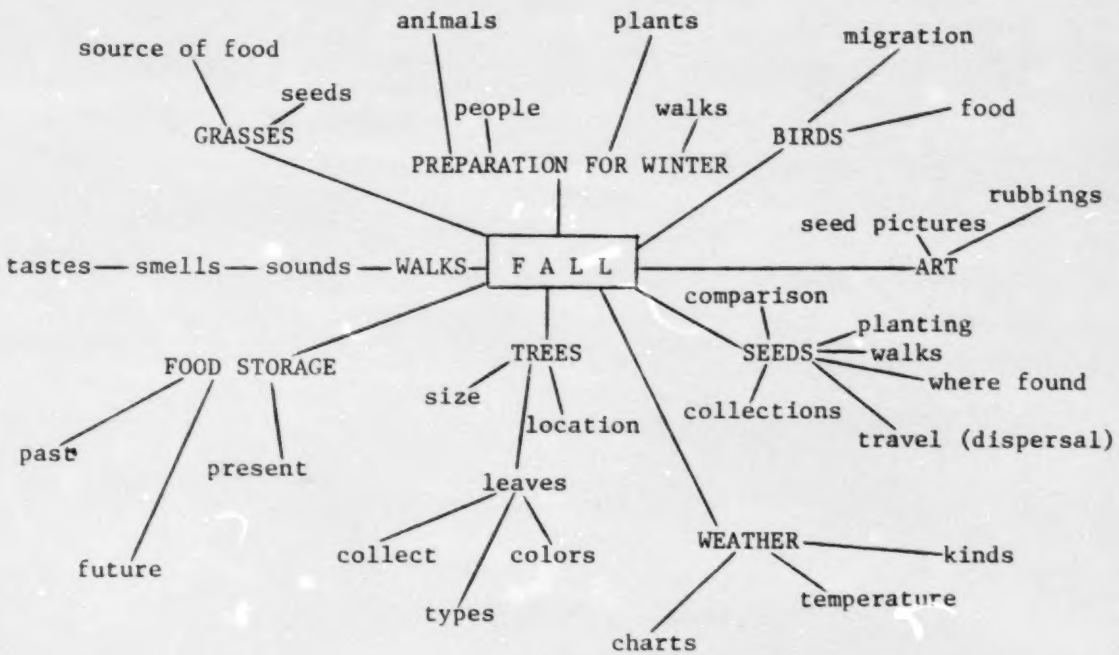
* Pederson, Clara, Comp. Informal Education Series, Reading and Language Arts II--Themes. University of North Dakota, July 1981, pp. 11-15. (This publication is out of print.)



Fall

Fall is a part of the much larger theme of change. It can be studied in more depth.



Walks, Walks, Walks

They only take ten to twenty minutes, but so much learning takes place.

For each walk, have an objective in mind. You, I know, have many ideas as to what to do as a follow up to these walks. Here are just a few:

Twigs - for making designs, line drawings, parts of a mural
Seeds - for mosaics, planting, storing, sorting
Leaves - for art, science
Clouds - for shape, imagination, pictures (what do you see?)
Seeing - for murals, discussions
Stone - for paper weight, painting, animals, designs, collage
Color - for poetry, color theme

Have you ever taken a tape recorder along to record comments of children as they are on a walk? Have you ever made a talking bulletin board as a result of a walk or a field trip?

Collecting Leaves

Colored leaves pressed between clear contact paper or wax paper (press with a cool iron) make beautiful transparencies and serve as a reminder of a collecting trip or an introduction to the study of leaf coloration.

Count the leaves.

Sort leaves by color, shape, size, feel.

A chart summarizing measurements and discoveries makes a good follow up.

Use leaves to make rubbings, prints, designs.

Watch the area around your school for changes in leaf coloration. If you are collecting leaves, you will need newspapers or magazines with absorbent pages. After the leaves have been put between the pages, put a heavy weight on them to keep the leaves from wrinkling. Keep them pressed for several days. Leaves dried this way can be used for a long time. They can even be "reconstituted" in winter months for making leaf prints by putting them between moist newspapers for 24 hours.

Examine a weed patch for leaf coloration.

Concepts of the way in which leaf coloration changes with the removal of chlorophyll can be done with water-color paints or colored overlays on an overhead projector. Start with yellow, add green - what happens? If you start with red and add green - what color is the leaf?

Collecting Trees

Get acquainted with one tree. Admire its trunk. Notice the branches, twigs and leaves. Children enjoy measuring a tree with hands and arms. How big around is the trunk? Can you put your hand around it? Two hands? Your arms? Does it take more than one child to reach around it?

Examine and feel the bark. Look at its ridges and patterns. Feel its texture and hardness. A bark rubbing can be made with wax crayons and paper as a record of the tree.

Select a tree to visit repeatedly. Observe and record changes. A dated chart with entries such as mounted leaves, twigs, flowers, rubbings, fruit and/or seeds will enable children to make seasonal comparisons.

If there are several trees of the same kind on your grounds, compare them for size, shape, leaf coloration, etc. If there are differences, can children think of explanations?

Make a trip to see how many different trees you can find. You can make a census without listing names by mounting samples of a leaf, seed, etc., from each tree. It's good to have books available for children who want to discover names by making a comparison of the specimens with illustrations.

Collecting Seeds

Examine a peanut or soaked lima bean to find the two seed leaves surrounding the immature plant. A comparison of several seeds helps children see basic similarities as well as differences. (See Informal Education Science, pp. 26-40 for detailed instructions.)

After a seed walk, have you discussed -

1. How seeds are the same?
2. How they are different?
3. How they travel? (wind, birds, animals, man, machines, hitch-a-ride, etc.)
4. Which plants do not have seeds at this time?

Collecting Grasses

There are about 1500 kinds of grasses growing in the United States. Some kinds, such as corn, oats, wheat, rye, barley, rice and sugar cane, are grown as important sources of food. Others are pasture or hay grasses. Still others are grown for lawns or to hold soil. Some grasses are classed as weeds, but even weed grasses make and hold soil and frequently serve as food for birds and other wildlife. Now when grasses are blooming, it is a good time to take a grass census.

1. How are they the same? different?
2. How are the grasses used?
3. How many different grasses can be found?
4. How do their seeds compare with seeds from a tree?

Follow up with a chart of mounted specimens to show the variety of grasses.

Grass can be experienced with all our senses.

TOUCH: feeling its coolness
rolling the round stem between thumb and finger
comparing the feel underfoot of pavement, bare ground and turf

SOUND: make a grass blade whistle

SIGHT: how many different kinds can be found

SMELL: a few grasses have distinct odors

Art

Suggestions for art activities are as follows:

LEAFY CREATURES - Use leaves to form the body shapes of animals, birds, people, etc.
Leaves are glued on paper
Additional body parts can be drawn in

CRAYON RESIST - Collect large leaves
Arrange on 9" x 12" sheet of paper
Trace around leaves
Remove leaf and color the shape firmly
Paint the paper with a water color (tempera works fine)
The wax from the crayon will resist the paint, and the leaves will stand out.

NATURE MOBILE - Use a curved branch of driftwood from which to hang rocks, shells, cones, leaves, or other objects from nature.

SCULPTURE FROM NATURAL OBJECTS - Collect natural material (seeds, twigs, pine cones, seed pod)
Elmer's glue
Paint (optional)
Quick drying spray (clear)
Construction paper

1. Arrange items to create a small piece of sculpture
2. Glue together
3. Bits of paper or paint can be used to enhance creation
4. Spray to preserve the finish

MONOPRINTING WITH LEAVES - Materials: collection of leaves, fern branches, tempera paint, brush, paper to print on, newspapers

Place a leaf or fern frond, vein side up, on a newspaper. Apply paint with a paintbrush, keeping the brush fairly dry to prevent blobbing. Move the painted leaf or frond to a clean piece of newspaper. Position the printing paper on

top, checking to make sure the leaf shape will be in the center of the paper. Rub gently with fingers and palms of the hand. Lift paper away carefully.

Hints: Some plants are easier to handle if they are pressed in a book between layers of paper towel to flatten before printing. Blossoms and ferns should be printed right away before the petals sodden, fern fronds curl up, and some delicate leaves stick to the paper. Try different kinds of paper. Prints in black and white can be very attractive.

MONOPRINTING WITH A HEAT-TRAY - Materials: electric table heat-tray, aluminum foil, wax crayons, paper, old cloth or paper towels for cleaning tray

Procedure: Cover tray with aluminum foil. Allow tray to get warm. Color onto aluminum. The crayon will melt. Make designs using several colors. Lay paper on the melted design. Press gently and rub carefully with paper towel or cloth. Lift off paper. Wipe tray clean, and start again with new print. After the print cools, cut out leaf shapes.

Caution: Don't let tray get too hot or all colors will turn black. Fluorescent crayons make vivid, brilliant designs.

TISSUE PAPER OVERLAYS - Materials: tissue paper, background paper (heavy white construction paper or white tagboard), acrylic polymer medium or diluted Elmer's glue, brush

Make designs on background paper of small shapes such as tissue, threads, grass, leaves, flower petals, flat twigs, etc.. Place a piece of tissue over the design. Brush the covering tissue with polymer or Elmer's glue. This will soak through the tissue and dry clear. You can use either single or multilayers of tissue or a combination of both. Black magic marker can be used to accent overlap.

PARCHMENT TISSUE - Materials: wax paper, assorted colors of tissue, liquid starch, brush

Lay newspapers on working surface and cover with wax paper. Pour liquid starch on wax paper and brush it over entire surface. (This will bead and not appear to adhere.) Tear colored tissue and pat on wet surface of wax paper. Cover entire surface with assorted colors of tissue. Continue brushing liquid starch over tissue and laying more tissue on top, until there are about three layers. Let dry 24 hours. When thoroughly dry, peel away the wax paper. The result will be a stiff, parchment like, translucent sheet of tissue of many

colors. This paper can be used for stained glass windows, mobiles, butterflies, flowers, etc., or let students cut leaf shapes from it. Students can use their leaf shapes to make a mobile. Encourage experimenting.

Combine tissue with: wire sculpture, balsa wood sculpture, pipe cleaners, yarn on heavy white paper, papier mache sculpture, weaving

SPATTER PAINTING - Prepare 7" squares of wire screening and bind edges with masking tape. Place leaves or other objects on a sheet of paper. Hold screen over objects and brush paint-filled toothbrush over screen. The paint will spatter over the paper and objects. When completed, lift objects off page. Stencil will appear.

SEED PICTURES - Materials: heavy paper like tag or cardboard, seeds (different kinds - beans, peas, corn, etc.), water paint in pans, baby food jars for water

Procedure: Paint a background with watercolors. Glue on seeds to finish picture.

LEAF RUBBINGS - Place a variety of leaves on a table top, on the floor or on some other hard surface. Each child then arranges a leaf picture any way he wants and covers the leaves with a piece of thin but strong paper. While a partner holds the paper steady, he rubs the paper with the chalk until he gets a print of the leaves.

BARK RUBBINGS - Give each child several foot-square pieces of sheet material or other cloth of a solid color. White, red, green - any color will do. While one child holds the cloth against a tree trunk, another rubs the side of an oil pastel chalk or crayon over the cloth to record the texture pattern of the bark. Try plenty of trees and color combinations.

"I found that working with a theme provided me with the FLEXIBILITY I needed to develop an interesting and challenging learning environment for children, and at the same time, it also gave me a STRUCTURE for planning, teaching and evaluating."

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Rosanne Kessens was a member of the faculty at the Center for Teaching and Learning from August 1978 until her death in August 1981.